

context, framework, site

investigation of site and surroundings





Figure 3.1: Aerial photo showing
Ditsong: National Museum
of Natural History in context

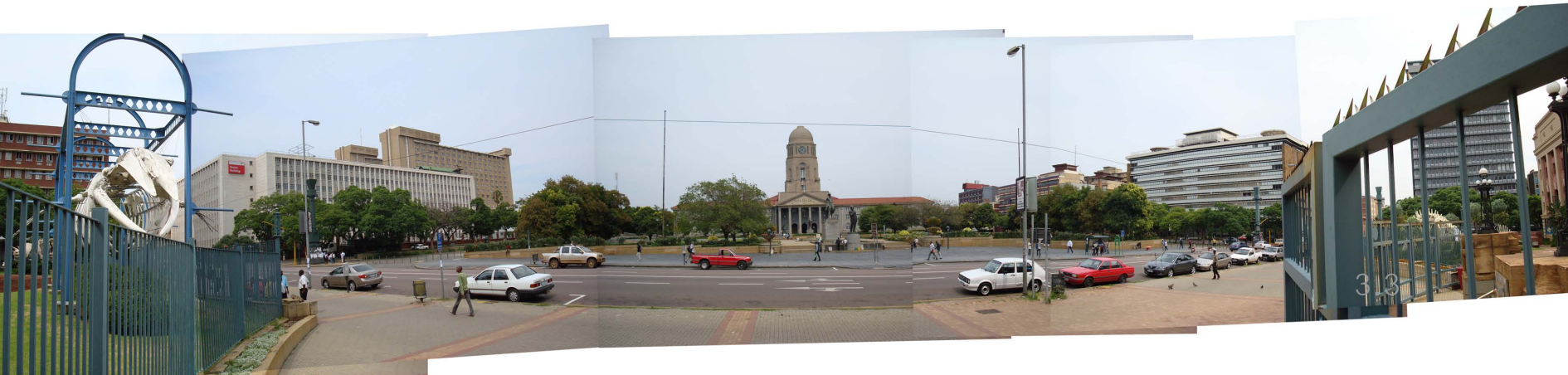
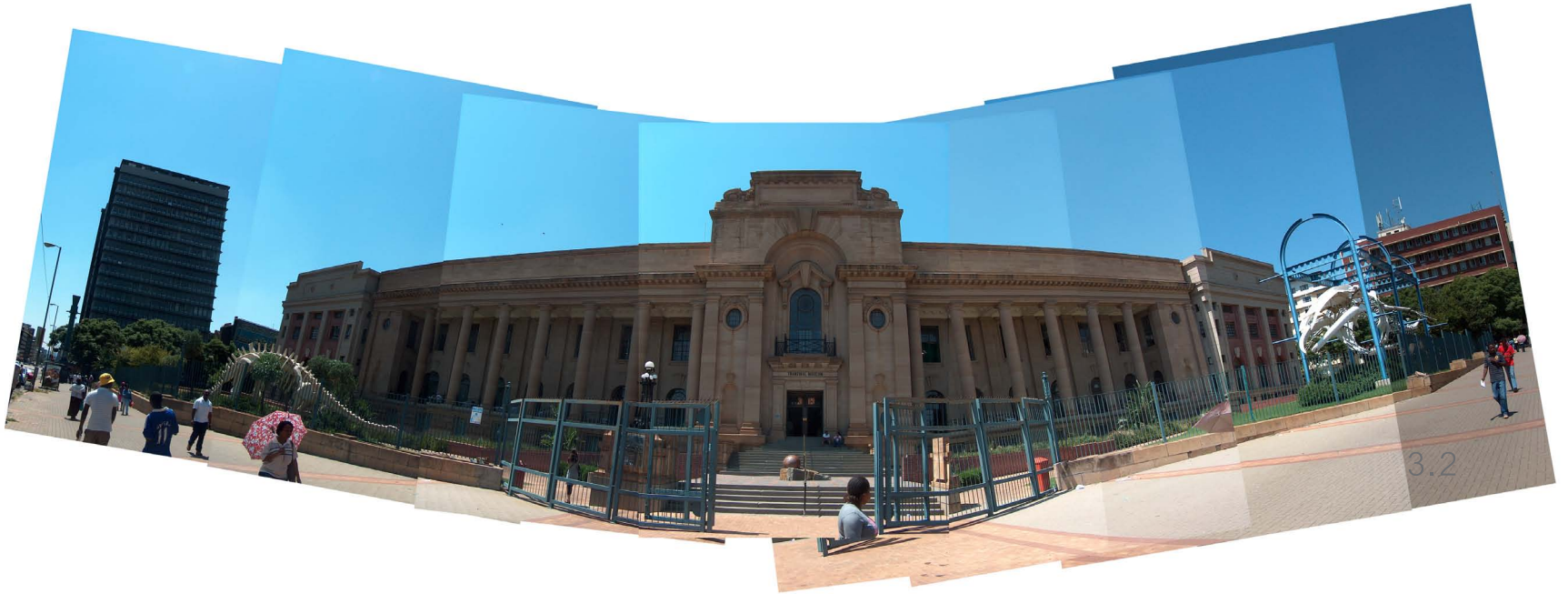


Figure 3.2: View of main entrance of Ditsong National Museum of Natural History from Paul Kruger Street
Figure 3.3: View of City Hall from Ditsong National Museum of Natural History entrance

3.1 Framework

The scheme forms part of the Plug-in Festival framework and should be seen as part of the bigger framework. The framework is derived from the existing Jakaranda festival that is an annual cultural festival. Most of the venues however are situated to the east of Pretoria, and not in the inner city. The aim of the framework is to revive an interest in the inner city by bringing the festival into the city and to use its existing infrastructure and programme, to add to the festival.

The framework focuses on site specific interventions with common vision, where each intervention functions as a catalyst on its own, thus creating points of rejuvenation throughout the city. The Museum is an existing cultural node in the city and situated on the Museum walk¹, but can benefit from an intervention within the existing building to act as site specific catalyst to revive interest in the museum. This, in turn, will aid the Museum Walk and larger framework.

Figure 3.4: Framework; museum walk and city centre walk



¹The museum walk refers to the route connecting the National Museum of Natural history, National Museum of Cultural History and the Kruger Museum.

An annual festival such as this would change from year to year. This becomes an important consideration in terms of the museum intervention. To keep the interest of the users, the intervention in the museum would have to change and adapt with the festival. The required adaptability becomes a driving force in terms of concept for the intervention.

3.2 Site

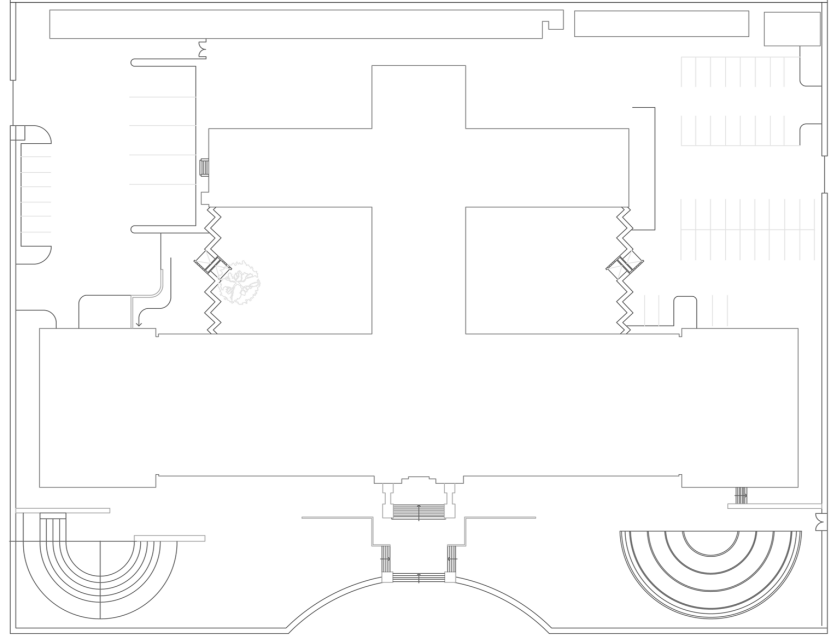
The Ditsong: National Museum of Natural History (hereafter referred to as Ditsong Museum), previously known as the Transvaal Museum of Natural History, forms part of the Ditsong: Northern Flagship Institute, which develops, manages and administers eight museums in the Gauteng region under the fields of fauna, palaeontology, cultural history, military history, anthropology and archaeology (Ditsong: Northern Flagships Institutions: [sa]). Ditsong Museum is situated on Paul Kruger Street across from City Hall, between Visagie and Minnaar Streets.

3.2.1 Ditsong Museum history

The museum was first situated in a building in Boom Street, Pretoria. It was officially opened on 15 December 1904. In 1912 some of the items were moved to the current site in Paul Kruger Street, although at that time only the centre portion of the building was built because of the outbreak of the First World War, even though the building was planned to be in the shape of an H (Grobler 2006:65). The museum needed more space and between 1995 and 1997 the northern and southern flanks were added. The two steel vaults (Highveld and Lowveld biodomes) were built in the same period.



VISAGIE STREET



MINNAAR STREET

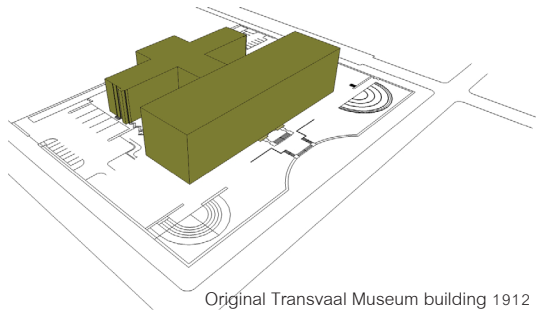
PAUL KRUGER STREET

3.6

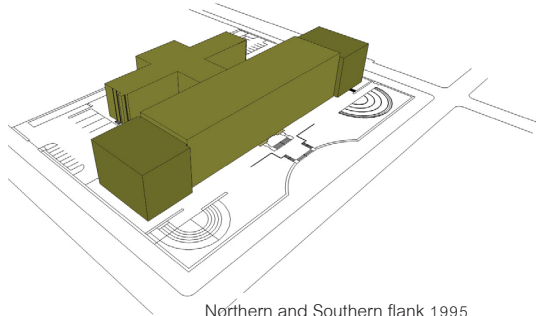
3.5

Figure 3.5: Map showing location of Ditsong: National Museum of Natural History
Figure 3.6: Site plan

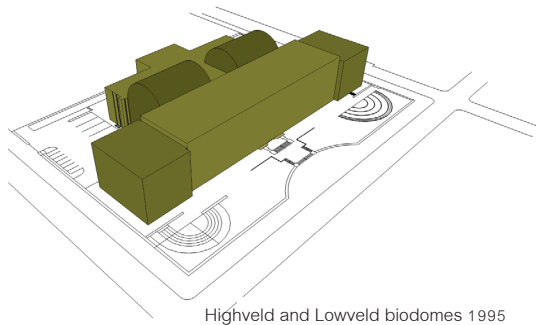
The northern flank houses the Discovery Centre, storage space and the headquarters of the Ditsong Northern Flagships Institution. The southern flank houses storage and a restaurant. The Discovery Centre in the northern flank is aimed at creating a more experience based exhibition for children aged between three and eight. Older children do visit the centre, but is not the main focus group (Vermaak 2010). The centre includes amongst others a place for discussions or storytelling, a shadow puppet show, an insect collection that can be seen under microscopes and an exhibition of photosynthesis.



Original Transvaal Museum building 1912



Northern and Southern flank 1995



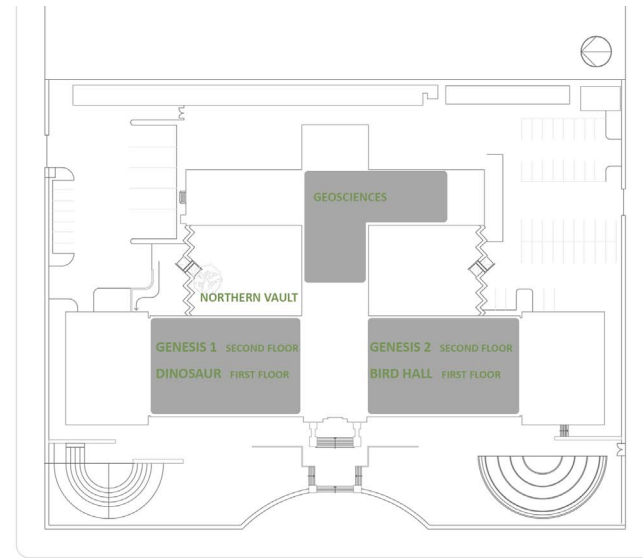
Highveld and Lowveld biodomes 1995

3.7

The original intention for the steel vaults was to create a Highveld and Lowveld 'biodome'. The northern vault was intended to be the Highveld biodome, where the plants still can be seen as typical of the Highveld region. In addition to the plants, the intention was to have live animals in cages to be observed by visitors of the museum, in both the Highveld and Lowveld biodome. The museum could not carry the cost implications this had, so the animals were sent to the Pretoria Zoo. The vaults are steel structures connected to the building that surrounds it on three sides. At the moment these vaults stand empty except for a small temporary building in the southern flank that serves as work space for a palaeontologist.

3.2.2 Ditsong Museum at present

The museum has different categories within its exhibition spaces (figure 3.8). Genesis 1 (Hall of Life) exhibits the animal kingdom starting from single cell organisms. This includes amongst others reptiles, fish, amphibians, insects and arthropods. Genesis 2 exhibits mammals. The Bird Hall houses an encompassing collection of the birds of southern Africa as set out by Austin Roberts. The Museum of Geosciences has an exhibition of minerals, crystals and precious stones. The dinosaur exhibition is due to open during 2010.



3.8



Figure 3.7: Diagram showing development of the museum
Figure 3.8: Diagram showing location of exhibition spaces
Figure 3.9: Northern vault with museum building around it. Southern vault in background

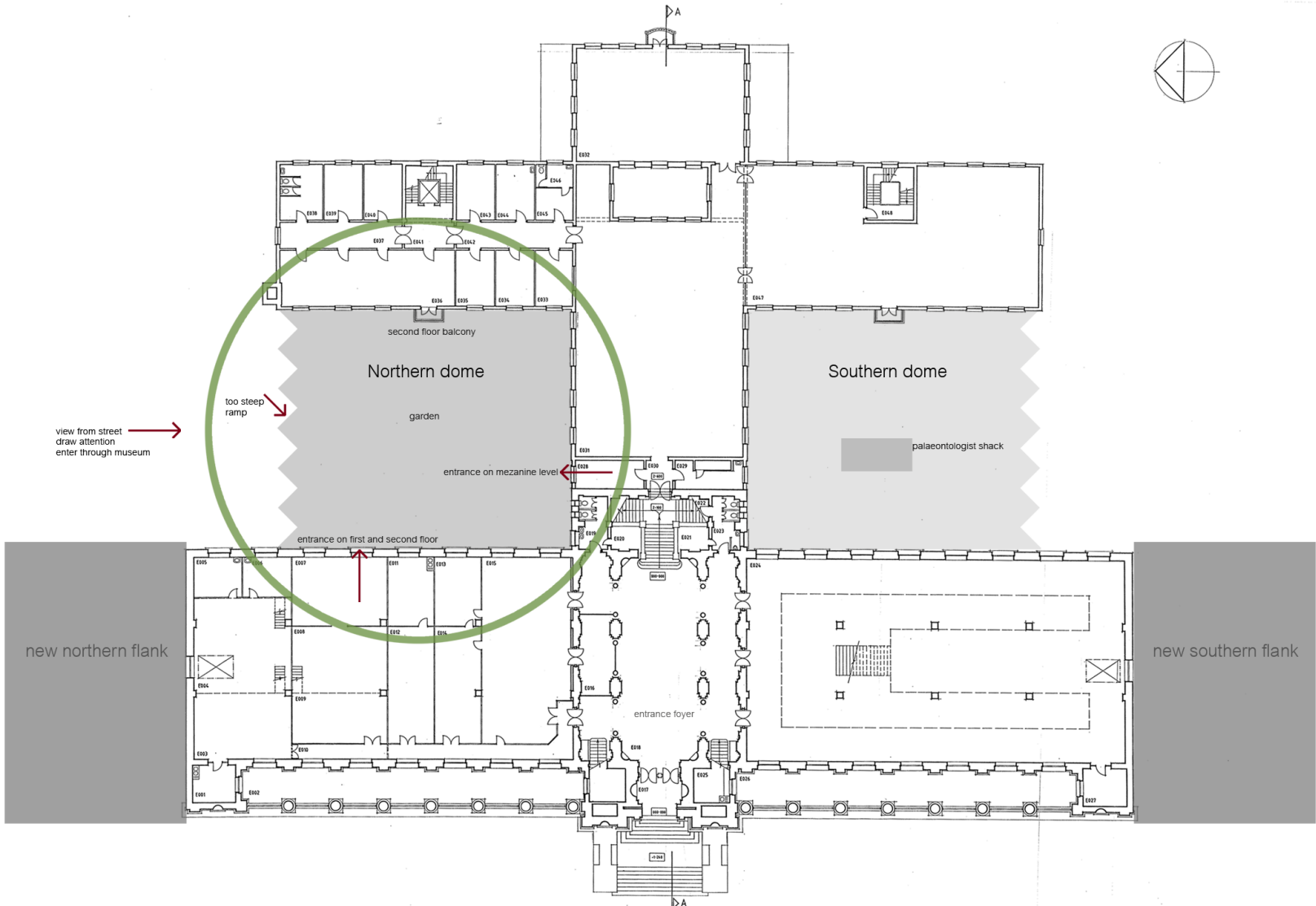
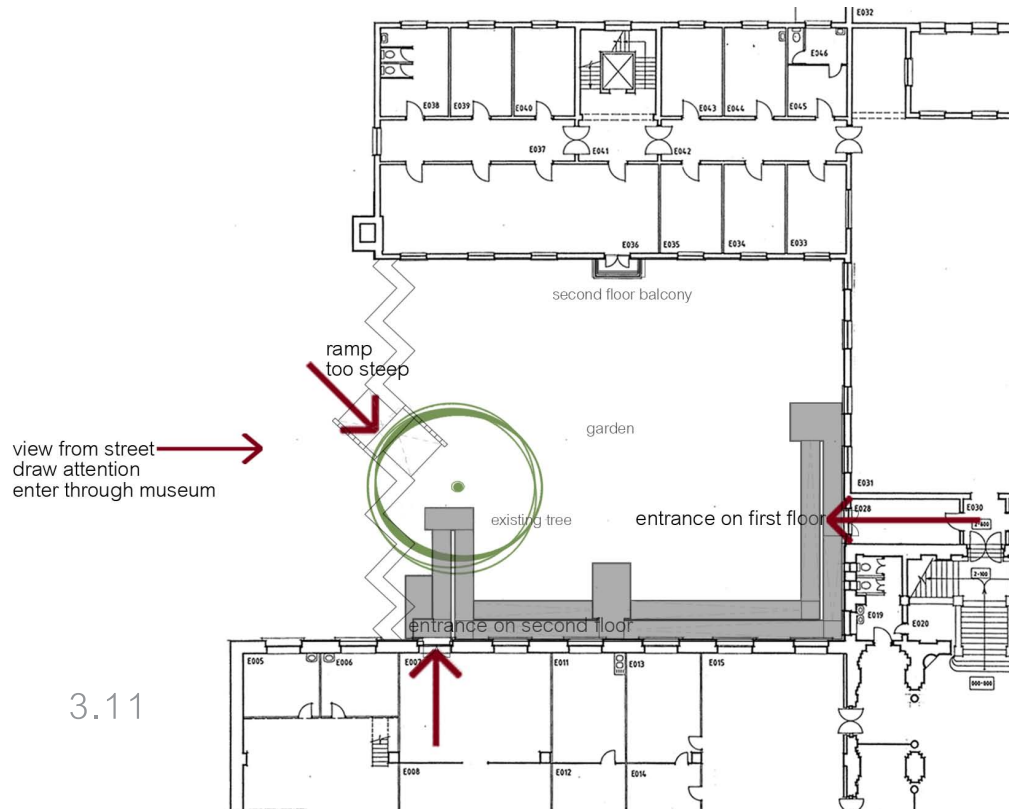


Figure 3.10: Ground floor plan of museum and vault structure

According to Erna Vermaak (2010), educational co-ordinator at the museum, the aim is to change the exhibitions during the next three to five years, to conform to contemporary and international standards. The story line for the new exhibitions is being written at present and would include other subjects that are not necessarily covered in the research done at the museum itself. This includes global warming, South African biomes and the plant and animal life in these biomes, evolution, extinction events etc. The collections on exhibition at the moment will be incorporated into the new story line and exhibitions as far as possible (Vermaak 2010).

3.2.3 The vault structure

The northern vault was chosen as space for the intervention, because of its visibility from Visagie Street which is much busier than Minnaar Street. The experience of a natural habitat is much more pronounced in the northern vault, because of the existing Highveld garden, which contributed to the choice of site as well.



3.11

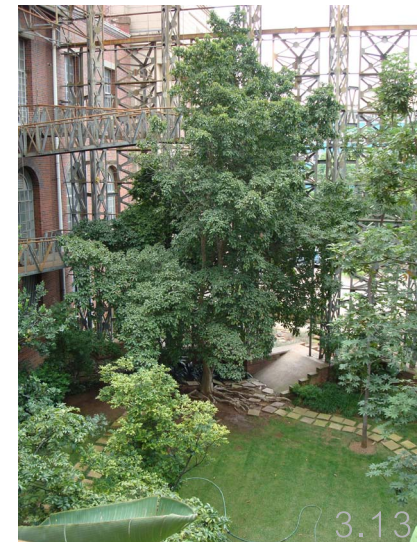


Figure 3.11: Diagram illustrating entrances into vault structure
Figure 3.12: Photo showing ramp structure in Northern vault
Figure 3.13: Photo showing interior of the structure

The building is linked to the interior space of the vault by a ramp structure that connects the mezzanine level on the centre flank of the main building with the first and second floor on the northern flank. The ramp is not connected with the ground level. The only access to the ground level is through the northern flank, around the older part of the building and out at ground level. Entrance into the structure on ground level is over a steep ramp.

When inside the structure calmness and a sense of silence are experienced, even though traffic from Visagie Street can clearly be heard. The volume within the structure is uninterrupted by any elements and has natural light flooding in through the mesh covered structure. This creates a contrast with the darker museum interior. The ramp is mostly confined to the edges of the space and therefore does not impinge on the volume. The occupant of the space constantly has a link with the sky through the steel mesh. This contributes to the sense of calmness and relief.

The connection of the steel structure with the museum building creates a contrast between materials. The contrast between the two spaces, interior of museum and interior of the structure, is enhanced by dark and light as well as the man made environment of the building against the natural environment within the structure created through plants. The structure itself creates a contrast between steel and plant.

The garden in the structure consists of a few established trees and shrubs, all indigenous to the Highveld. The *Ficus thonningii* (wild fig tree) seen in figure 2.9, will definitely be kept and reacted to in the intervention. The rest of the vegetation will be manipulated to influence the experience of the space. This will provide an opportunity to create experience

through plants that can contribute to the specific experience of the program.

Through the windows in the northern flank of the building the space in the vault can be seen. These windows are temporarily blocked out by the existing exhibition in Genesis 1, but if this link is re-established it could create curiosity towards the intervention in the vault. This will become an important consideration in the proposal and design for further development of the museum interior and exhibitions.

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At present, the space within the steel structure portrays the idea of a natural habitat within a man-made environment, because of the change from museum to vault, its isolation from the museum interior, the constant link with the sky and therefore natural light and the green of the garden on ground level.

Contrast exists between the structure and the museum building. This is created by the following aspects:

- Material of steel structure against brick of museum building.
- Natural light in structure against dark interior of museum.
- Natural environment within structure against man-made environment of museum.

This contrast might become integral in the design development along with other aspects like sensitivity towards the volume within the structure and the enhancement in the experience thereof, investigation of the threshold between museum and vault or man-made and natural and re-establishing the sense of habitat within the structure.



Figure 3.14: Photo illustrating contrast between steel and plant
Figure 3.15: Photo illustrating contrast between structure and building